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ABSTRACT

This review examines co-parenting, the more or less equal sharing of parenting responsibilities by mothers and fathers. Because co-parenting remains an anomaly, much of the review addresses men's levels and forms of parenting involvement. Also investigated are the factors contributing to their participation and nonparticipation. Noting that parental participation occurs primarily in three family arrangements--married or cohabiting fathers in intact families; separated or divorced fathers; and unwed young fathers--the review is organized by family type. The review notes that men's parenting participation varies both within and across family structural arrangements. For the most part, mothers continue to be the primary child-rearers and caretakers; while some men are more involved in parenting than were their own fathers or many of their peers, relatively little change has occurred overall. Another significant finding is that father involvement in each type of family arrangement is closely intertwined with fathers' relationship with the mothers of their children. Both institutional and personal factors contribute to men's limited parenting involvement. Research indicates that both children and fathers benefit from increased paternal involvement in parenting. The study of fathering, and, more specifically, co-parenting is multidisciplinary. (Contains 313 references.) (Author/KB)

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# Co-Parenting: A Review of the Literature

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by

Terry Arendell
Colby College

Commissioned by the

National Center on
Fathers and Families

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**Abstract**

This paper examines co-parenting; that is, the more or less equal sharing of parenting responsibilities by mothers and fathers. Because co-parenting remains an anomaly, much of the review addresses men's levels and forms of parenting involvement. Also investigated are the factors contributing to their participation and non-participation. Parental participation occurs primarily in three family arrangements: married or cohabiting fathers in intact families; separated or divorced fathers; and unwed young fathers. The paper is organized by family type. Men's parenting participation varies both within and across family structural arrangements. For the most part, mothers continue to be the primary rearers and caretakers of children; while some men are more involved in parenting than were their own fathers or many of their peers, relatively little change has occurred overall. Another significant finding is that father involvement in each type of family arrangement is closely intertwined with fathers' relationships with the mothers of their children. Both institutional and personal factors contribute to men's limited parenting involvement. Research indicates that both children and fathers benefit from increased paternal involvement in parenting. The study of fathering, and, more specifically, co-parenting is multidisciplinary.

*The National Center on Fathers and Families (NCOFF) is a policy research center that is practice-focused and practice-derived. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, NCOFF's mission is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families by facilitating the effective involvement of fathers in caring for, supporting, and advocating on behalf of their children. Efforts are organized around three interdependent approaches: program development, a policy research and policymakers engagement component, and dissemination activities. NCOFF's research plan is developed around seven "Core Learnings," distilled from the experiences of programs and agencies serving fathers, mothers, and children around the country.*

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# Co-Parenting: A Review of the Literature

by Terry Arendell

Co-parenting encompasses several meanings. In some cases, it is synonymous with shared parenting. Other times it basically refers to father presence in the lives of children and their mothers, no matter how limited the parental involvement. Mothers still carry the lion's share of parenting responsibility. Maternal childrearing is mostly taken for granted and fathers' involvement compared to or juxtaposed over and against mothers', including in discussions of co-parenting. Diversity in family composition or structure accounts for much of the varied meanings of the term co-parenting.

Adult roles in families with children can be characterized, to paraphrase Cowan and Cowan (1988), as parenting, partnering, and providing. Sahler (1983:219) defines parenting as a special category of childrearing which "is the art of overseeing a child's growth and development." Men's possible parenting contributions, assuming an intact marriage, are described variously as the activities of: meeting children's needs, providing contrast effects by offering children two different primary caretakers, and creating a social picture of normalcy in a society which continues to value the two-parent, nuclear family. Men, and women, also contribute to parenting by providing support to the other parent (e.g., Crnic and Booth, 1991; May and Strikwerda, 1992; for a psychoanalytic perspective see Muir, 1989, and more generally, Cath et al., 1989).

Paternal participation occurs primarily in three family arrangements: married or cohabiting fathers in intact families, hereafter referred to as married fathers; separated or divorced fathers living apart from their former wives, the mothers of their children; and unwed young fathers who usually do not share a household with their offspring but, instead, continue to reside with a parent, parents, or other family members.[1] Men's parenting participation varies both within and across family structural arrangements.

The three predominant family arrangements present men with somewhat distinctive parenting issues and challenges. At the same time, common patterns prevail across the family forms. These similarities have to do with sociocultural definitions and expectations of gender identities as well as parenting assignments, characteristics, and expectations. Masculinity — i.e., men's gender role and identity prescriptions, as conventionally defined — does not mesh easily and smoothly with direct parental caregiving and nurturing activities (Arendell, 1995; Gerson, 1993; Franklin, 1988). Cowan and Cowan (1987:165), noting that fathers in their longitudinal study invested less effort in sharing the care of their babies

[1] It is important to note that co- or shared parenting can also refer to other parenting arrangements, such as those involving same-sex parents or a parent and a grandparent; these and other alternatives are not considered in this review of literature.

than they expected, posed a similar explanation:

Despite some support for the idea of a new definition of fatherhood, there are powerful barriers to men actually becoming equal participants in family making. Men bump up against these barriers in relationships between the generations, in the workplace, with their wives, and within themselves.

Research on fathering has expanded in scope and breadth over the last several decades (e.g., Berman and Pedersen, 1987a; Pedersen, 1987). Nonetheless, investigations of and conceptualizations about men's behaviors in and attitudes toward families are still sparse compared to studies of mothering and family processes, more generally. Indeed, relatively little is known about what residential fathers actually do, how their activities vary, and what the variability means (Harris and Morgan, 1991:541; Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989; Radin, 1994, 1988). Arguably, even less is known about the parental involvement of formerly married fathers who do not reside with their children: "the parenting alliance has received modest empirical attention in both intact and divorced families" (Gable et al., 1992:285). Little is known about the parental participation by young unwed fathers. Study specifically of co-parenting as more or less equally shared parenting responsibility in any of the three family structural arrangements is especially limited, due partly, no doubt, to the infrequency of such paternal involvement. The point is that how shared parenting arrangements are negotiated between and maintained by parents is more speculative than grounded in empirical evidence.

Much of the existent empirical research involves small samples, often samples of convenience, and utilizes qualitative research methods, especially interviews but also, on occasion, observational studies. These projects provide access to men's accounts of their family involvement and to their actual behaviors. Over the past several decades use of quantitative analyses has provided more global, generalized views of men's involvement in and attitudes about childrearing. Especially significant are the nationally representative survey data sets, such as the National Survey of Families and Households, the National Survey of Children, and the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches offer unique and valuable information; as well, each methodology carries some inherent limitations (e.g., Babbie, 1992; Katz, 1983). Case studies and analyses offered by therapists, often using a psychoanalytic-developmental perspective, are another source of data (e.g., Muir, 1989; Gurwitt, 1989; Atkins, 1989). An array of behavioral and social science academic disciplines are involved in the study of fathers and fathering (e.g., Bronstein and Cowan, 1988, Pedersen, 1987). Ideally, future study of fathering will draw more fully on the panoply of research methods and integrate multidisciplinary approaches.

What is evident in the extant body of research is that fathers, in general, do far less parenting work than mothers, and most men view their parenting involvement as discretionary. Highly involved fathers are an anomaly. For the most part, father participation in child caretaking is greatest among married men and lowest among unwed young fathers. This paper follows this pattern in its organizational format: looked at first is father involvement and its diversity in married families; examined next is the research evidence on paternal participation in separated and divorced families; and considered last are the findings regarding young fathers. The focus throughout the paper is on father involvement or non-involvement in parenting and, where

possible, men's involvement in shared parenting. Touched upon only very briefly is the literature pertaining to the effects of father involvement on children.

The particulars of the three bodies of research on father involvement — married fathers, divorced fathers, and young unwed fathers — are quite discrepant for the most part, reflecting the family types' diverse and often divergent situational and interpersonal characteristics. So too they differ in that researchers often imply that parenting by married couples is normative while that by the divorced or unwed young parent is atypical if not actually deviant.

## *FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN MARRIED FAMILIES*

The term co-parenting or shared parenting among married couples typically refers to arrangements in which fathers' participation is more or less equal to mothers'. Such involvement remains relatively rare, despite the increased rhetorical attention given to the "new father" in recent years.

### Parenting and the Conventional Gendered Division of Labor

Men's primary family role across the twentieth century has been predominantly that of income-providing. The *good provider role* is a major component of the norms and conventions of masculinity: a man's status and worth are linked closely to his occupational achievements and earnings levels. Although offering men, who are able to meet the success ethic, prestige and an array of domestic power and privileges, the good provider role carries costs as well, particularly in curtailing men's expressiveness, intimacy, and nurturing activities (Bernard, 1981; Goode, 1982; Weiss, 1990; 1987; 1985).

Not only men but also women expect men to be income providers and measure their worth by their earnings and occupational status (Faludi, 1991). At the same time, the good provider role is being challenged, with demands being levied against men to be more expressive, affectionate, and disclosing, and far more involved in the numerous facets of daily family life. Some men actively reject the narrow provider role and choose to be fuller family participants.

Traditionally, caring for others, including children, has been a gendered activity, defined as women's work and done predominately by women (e.g., Tronto, 1989; Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Cox et al., 1989; Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993; Perry-Jenkins and Folk, 1994; Chodorow, 1978; Pleck, 1987). Few men have increased their household and childcaretaking efforts significantly, even though women now couple their traditional domestic and parenting roles with those of income earning, sharing the provider role (e.g., Blair and Johnson, 1992). Men remain preoccupied predominately with activities outside the home (e.g., Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1985; Douthitt, 1988; Seidler, 1992), and mothers carry primary responsibility for child care, regardless of their employment status (Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993). Thus, women's employment has not led to clear-cut changes in family roles (e.g., Fish et al., 1992; Hochschild, 1989).

#### *Racial Variations*

Most research on fathering has involved White, usually middle or upper-middle class men. There is, however, a growing body of literature pertaining specifically to Black fathers in intact families, also typically middle and middle-upper class. These findings indicate that race is not a significant variable in paternal involvement. Black and White fathers participate similarly (McAdoo, 1988; Beckett and Smith, 1981); as in White families, mothers in Black families are the

primary caretakers with fathers having some involvement (Hossain and Roopnarine, 1993). Researchers reject common assumptions about Black men's family activity. For instance, "the existing stereotype of the absent or otherwise deficient Black father is very much a product of research that focused in a very limited way on economically disadvantaged Black families, with the results often generalized to all Black fathers and their families" (McAdoo, 1988:89). Similarly debunked is the myth that role flexibility and sharing characterize middle-class Black families (Wilson et al., 1990:421-2; Mirandé, 1988).

### *Involved Fathers' Activities*

Fathers are more likely to engage in play activities with their children than to perform any other type of child care (e.g., Lamb, 1987; Douthitt, 1988; LaRossa and LaRossa, 1989; LaRossa, 1988), and it is in the area of play where some men have most increased their parental activity (Marsiglio, 1991; Backett, 1987; Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993; Lamb et al., 1986). Addressing the research findings on mothers' and fathers' parenting styles, Lamb and Oppenheim (1989:13) stated:

> Mothers' interactions with their children are dominated by caretaking, whereas fathers are behaviorally defined as playmates. Mothers actually play with their children much more than fathers do, but as a proportion of the total amount of child-parent interaction, play is a much more prominent component of father-child interaction, whereas caretaking is much more salient with mothers.

Belsky and Volling (1987:39) also summarized parents' differential involvement:

> It appears that when families are observed in unstructured situations, in which they are permitted to go about their everyday household routines, there is very little similarity between mothers and fathers in sheer quantity of involvement. These data thus highlight the need to distinguish between parental competence and performance, that is, between what fathers can do and what they in fact do on a routine day-to-day basis (see Berman and Pedersen, 1987b, more generally).

Many men restrict their childcare activities mostly to the weekends (Douthitt, 1988).

In general, then, American men have not much increased their participation in direct parental and daily child care when they are present in families (Marsiglio, 1991; Douthitt, 1988), even though fathers may be more involved in their children's upbringing than were their own fathers (Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Cowan et al., 1985; Pleck, 1985; Grossman et al., 1988). Reviewing the literature on men's parenting involvement and concluding that little has changed, LaRossa (1988:5) referred to the pattern of paternal participation as "technically present but functionally absent." Most family scholars and researchers agree that fathers' participation is important to the men themselves, to their children, and to their wives (e.g., Grossman et al., 1988; Baruch and Barnett, 1986; Radin et al., 1993; Radin, 1994; 1988):

> Fathers who spend more time taking care of their young children may develop stronger attachments to them [Hood and Golden, 1979; Palkovitz, 1985], and their children appear to benefit from these enhanced connections [Biller, 1976; Lamb, 1976; 1981; Lamb et al., 1980; also see Ricks 1985, for a review] (Grossman et al., 1988:82).

Presently, however, most children's strongest attachments are to their mothers. Comparing parent-infant interactions in Swedish families, for example, Lamb and associates [1983] found that the "infants showed clear preferences for their mothers on measures of attachment and affiliative behavior" regardless of whether the fathers were highly involved in parental activity or not (Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989:14-15). Basow (1992:252), examining the literature on father-child attachments, concluded: "Given the small amount of time fathers generally spend engaged with their children, it is not surprising that most children and teenagers report a closer and better relationship with their mother than with their father [Balswick, 1988; McGill, 1985]."

### *Parental Satisfaction*

Not surprisingly, gender differences prevail not only in the division of family labor but also in levels of satisfaction with the allocation and assumption of responsibilities. In general, women are dissatisfied with men's limited parenting and domestic involvement while men either are not or are much less so (e.g., Cowan and Cowan, 1988; 1987; Dickie, 1987; Cox et al., 1989; Hochschild, 1989). More specifically, while both mothers and fathers indicate that they want more father participation in child care, mothers seem to want even more father participation than do their husbands (Dickie, 1987:138). An equitable division of labor is related to wives' levels of marital satisfaction whereas not to husbands' (Perry-Jenkins and Folk, 1994; see also Thompson and Walker, 1989). As Dickie (1987:118) summarized, "Parents' satisfaction with roles appears to be more important than the actual arrangements....Parent's concepts of their roles also are reflected in their sense of identity in being a parent." Fathers indicating higher parental identity than average report higher self-esteem and happiness with themselves, while the mothers reporting these positive attributes are those who report less parental identity. "Perhaps men and women have similar needs to nurture their children, but in our culture women may be in this role too much and men, too little" (Dickie, 1987:118). Levels of satisfaction affect marital quality which, in turn, is linked to parental involvement.

### *Challenges to Men's Parenting Roles*

Men's limited participation in child caretaking has been and continues to be questioned, perhaps especially in the middle and upper-middle classes. Fatherhood is in a state of flux (Rotundo, 1985; Griswold, 1993), and substantial variability in fathering behaviors prevails (Gerson, 1993).

> We argue that contemporary American norms encourage paternal involvement but that there is no single model fathers should follow. Moreover, sanctions are weak for noninvolvement and are absent altogether if involvement with children is incompatible with the breadwinner role....In such a climate of uncertainty, the behavior of the fathers is likely to be negotiated rather than adopted (Harris and Morgan, 1991:532).

The *culture of fatherhood* — "the shared norms, values, and beliefs surrounding men's parenting" — has changed more dramatically than have fathers' behaviors which "seem minimal at best" (LaRossa, 1988:451). Adding to the tensions, social institutions continue to support and even require the traditional practices and arrangements of gender and the related nuclear family with its ideologies of women's motherhood and men's provider roles. The workplace remains structured for the

conventional family form with its gender-based division of labor (e.g., Cohen, 1989; Coltrane, 1989; Pestello and Voydanoff, 1991; Sidel, 1992; Hochschild, 1989).

## Factors Affecting Paternal Involvement in Married Men's Parenting

Multiple influences affect fathers' parenting involvement. These include, both somewhat independently and in combination: maternal facilitation; marital quality; fathers' psychological characteristics, including motivation; gender role attitudes; child characteristics; and social situational factors, such as socioeconomic class status and occupational demands and rewards, and wives' employment.

### *Maternal Facilitation*

Wives play a pivotal role in facilitating husbands' involvement in parenting (e.g., Liljestrom, 1986; Backett, 1982; 1987; Baruch and Barnett, 1983; Hochschild, 1989; Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989).

> Mothers typically mediate the father-child relationship [Parke, 1985; Fox, 1985], consistent with women's marital role as emotional worker [Hochschild, 1983; 1989]. Commenting on men's parental involvement in two-parent middle-class families, Backett [1987:84] concluded: "Even when he *was* directly involved with the child, such interaction tended in any case to be mediated through the indirect understandings provided by the mother" (Arendell, 1995:23).

Further, wives' attitudes and past experiences are correlates of paternal involvement in parenting. Radin (1982) found that among couples in which fathers were the primary child caregiver, fathers' involvement was most closely related to mothers' recollections of satisfying but limited relations with their own fathers. Mothers' attitudes about increased father involvement vary widely, often suggesting resistance to or ambivalence about change from traditional gender roles (Ehrensaft, 1987; Pleck, 1982; see also Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989:17; Snarey, 1993). Women's attitudes may well be changing quite dramatically in this area as their participation in the employment sector remains steady and their perceptions persist, even increase, that they alone are carrying the "second shift" (Hochschild, 1989).

### *Marital Quality*

Fathering involvement is closely tied to perceived marital quality (Volling and Belsky, 1991; 1988; Cox et al., 1989; Cowan and Cowan, 1987; 1985; Cowan et al., 1985), more so than is mothering (e.g., Belsky, 1981; 1984; Belsky and Volling, 1987; Dickie, 1987; Belsky et al., 1984; Feldman et al., 1983; Yogman, 1983; Dozier et al., 1993). Berman and Pedersen (1987b:225) also conclude that the fathering role is more sensitive to the influence of marital factors than is the mothering role. For example, in both dual-earner and single-earner families, marital relations which are more positive and less negative are correlated with more responsive and stimulating relations between fathers and their infants. That is, fathers hold more positive attitudes toward their infants and their roles as parents when they are in close and confiding marriages (Cox et al., 1989; Volling and Belsky, 1988; 1991; Crouter and Crowley, 1990; Crouter, et al., 1987). Men who are unhappily married may withdraw not only from their wives but also their children (Dickstein and Parke, 1988). And men in second marriages are more likely to share

parenting tasks than those in first ones (Kimball, 1988).

Facets of the marital relationship influencing parenting include emotional support, cognitive support or agreement in childcare, and physical support or sharing childcare (Dickie, 1987:121). Crucial is the level of emotional support exchanged between spouses, again more so for paternal than maternal involvement: "the data show that fathers' parenting is more dependent on spousal support than mothers' parenting is" (Berman and Pedersen, 1987b:231). Wives' assessments of marital quality are related to men's parental involvement: "men whose marriages were characterized by the wife as 'not satisfying' or only 'partly satisfying' were less involved with their children" (Harris and Morgan, 1991:540). Snarey (1993:337), carrying forward a longitudinal study initiated by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck in the late 1930s and now into the fourth generation, concluded that fathers who are highly involved in parenting activities "are likely to have strong marital commitments" which he characterizes as marital affinity. Snarey frames his analysis with the Eriksonian developmental model, examining, in part, men's generativity.

Just how the quality of marriage affects the quantity and quality of parenting, however, is complex and not entirely clear: a common thread in the research on co-parenting "is that the marriage and co-parenting relationship are related in some ways, yet distinct in other, as of yet, unexplained ways" (Gable et al., 1992:285). The relationship seems to involve the indirect effects of the marital system on parenting (e.g., Cowan and Cowan, 1987), mothering on fathering (e.g., Belsky, 1979), and wives' attitudes toward their spouses' parenting involvement (e.g., Cowan and Cowan, 1985; Grossman et al., 1988; Ehrensaft, 1987).

### *Fathers' Psychological Characteristics*

Men with higher levels of self-esteem, who are more empathic and oriented to the feelings of others and are more child-centered, have higher levels of involvement with their children (e.g., Cowan and Cowan, 1985; 1987; Grossman et al., 1988; Grossman, 1987). Specifically, men's capacities for closeness and autonomy, as assessed before a child's birth, are the strongest predictors of the quality of their interactions with their children, according to Grossman et al. (1988) (see also Grossman, 1987; Volling and Belsky, 1988; 1991). Psychological maturity is a primary variable in fathers' childrearing participation (Cox et al., 1989). No clear psychological profile, however, has been discerned as to which men are most likely to be highly involved fathers. For example, Pruett (1989:404; see also Pruett, 1985), conducting a longitudinal study of 17 families in which the fathers were the primary child caretakers, using clinical measures and data, concluded:

> My secret hope at the outset of the study, to at least begin to delineate a description of a nurturing character or predisposition in men who become primary nurturing parents, has fallen short of fruition....It is conceivable to me, now that I've come to know this diverse group of families over time, that there never may be such a list.

Psychological characteristics considered to be healthy tend to be positively associated with marital quality also, perhaps because men with certain personalities are more likely to participate in families both as caring husbands and fathers (Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili, 1988:434; Berman and Pedersen, 1987b). Specifically, for example, Belsky (1984), who concluded that the personality or psychological well-being of the father is probably the most influential

determining factor of a father's parenting style, found psychological well-being to be integrally related to marital quality; personality plays a role in determining the character of other primary relationships as well as parental ones (see also Grossman et al., 1988).

Men's relationships to their own fathers are also significant predictors of parental closeness with their offspring, according to some findings (e.g., Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Belsky and Isabella, 1985), presumably also involving psychological factors. Snarey (1993:323) demonstrated that fathering by particular men is closely intertwined with intergenerational effects and relationships: "fathering is a complex process that spans the three-generational family system." Radin (1994), comparing the findings in studies of families in which fathers were primary caregivers, encompassing five societies,[2] found support for both the compensatory and modeling explanations of paternal involvement (see also Snarey, 1993). According to the compensatory hypothesis, fathers seek to compensate for their own fathers' limited availability by high levels of parental engagement. In contrast, the modeling perspective posits that men pattern their own parenting behaviors on their favorable recollections of high paternal involvement during their own childhoods (e.g., Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989; Radin, 1994; see also Pruett, 1989, for theoretical discussions of identification with both parents).

> Fathering received appears to provide a model of fathering to be given. Positive fathering received provides a direct picture or model to be passed on. Negative fathering received provides a negative picture that must first be reworked, as if reversing the negative of a photograph, but then is also able to provide a reworked, positive model of fathering to be passed on (Snarey, 1993:329).

Barnett and Baruch (1987) also found that the single greatest predictor in families in which only the fathers had paid employment is their attitudes toward the quality of the fathering they received. And Snarey (1993:339) indicated that once fathers have greater participation, their sons tend to have high parental participation: "Once this is set in motion, it is the fathers' boyhood backgrounds that predict the style of their participation." The role of mothering received was cited by primary parent or co-parent divorced fathers as crucial to their parenting (Arendell, 1995); this relationship is given scant if any attention in the literature on influences on men's parenting but warrants systematic research attention (Berman and Pedersen, 1987b).

Some researchers reject the primacy of psychological characteristics in paternal involvement in favor of marital quality. For instance, Cox et al. (1989) concluded that marital quality is more significant than psychological health. These researchers also found that even when differences in men's individual psychological adjustment are taken into account, mothers are warmer and more sensitive with their infants than are fathers (see also Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989).

### *Gender Role Attitudes*

Some evidence indicates that men who are less attached to the conventional prescriptions of masculinity and who are

[2] The five societies investigated in the research projects which Radin (1994) examines and compares are the Pruett investigation in the United States (Pruett, 1989; 1983); the Lamb investigation in Sweden (Lamb et al., 1982a; 1982b); the Russell investigation in Australia (Russell, 1986; 1987; Radin and Russell, 1983); the Sagi investigation in Israel (Radin and Sagi, 1982; Sagi, 1982; Sagi et al., 1987), and the Radin investigation in the United States (e.g., Radin, 1981; 1982; 1988; Radin and Goldsmith, 1985).

characterized as more androgynous and feminine, according to various measures, are more involved in parenting activities than other men (e.g., DeFrain, 1979; Feldman et al., 1983; May and Strikwerda, 1992; Barnett and Baruch, 1987). Moreover, men who are less committed to conventional definitions participate in domestic activities which require relatively greater time investments, such as child caretaking and cooking. They are also more likely to have wives who are employed (Bird et al., 1984).

Wives' gender role attitudes are also related to men's parental involvement. Wives who hold flexible and liberal ideas about men's roles in families are more likely to be married to men whose parental involvement is greater (e.g., Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Kimball, 1988). Yet, in general, many more wives than husbands hold egalitarian gender attitudes even if their marital practices do not adhere to them (e.g., Hochschild, 1989; Astrachan, 1985; Finlay et al., 1985; Hopkins, 1992).

### *Child Characteristics*

Children's sex is correlated with father involvement, literally from the time of birth forward. Fathers are less involved with daughters than with sons, according to most research findings (e.g., Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993; Grossman et al., 1988; Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Radin and Goldsmith, 1985). Co-parent fathers are more prevalent in families in which the first-born child is male (Fish et al., 1992). Morgan and associates (1988:123) summarized their analysis:

> Using data from the NSC, we find [in intact marriages with children], considerable evidence that fathers are actually more involved in rearing sons than in rearing daughters. Judging from the reports of both mothers and children, sons are closer to fathers than are daughters; according to the children, fathers participate in more activities with sons than with daughters; and children and mothers report that fathers are more involved in rule setting and discipline for boys than for girls.

Even fathers of infants are warmer and more sensitive and responsive to sons than to daughters (e.g., Cox et al., 1989). One study, in contrast, found that children's sex did not influence level of paternal involvement (Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993).

The age of a child and family size are also linked to men's parenting activities. Fathers' involvement increases as a child approaches the toddler stage, in comparison to infancy, but then generally declines as the child becomes older (e.g., Barnett and Baruch, 1987; Fish et al., 1992; Lamb, 1989). Snarey (1993:338), in contrast, concluded that "overall, fathers are more involved with their children in the middle years (5 to 15)." Numerous researchers argue that infancy may be a crucial period for fathers developing a sense of being a parent, affecting the level of caregiving involvement throughout a child's development (e.g., Cox et al., 1989; Grossman et al., 1988; Volling and Belsky, 1988; 1991; see also Osofsky and Culp, 1989). Father involvement in larger families generally is greatest with the oldest two children (Fish et al., 1992).

### *Social Situational Factors*

**Class**. Social class has been shown to affect both skills and time spent at parenting work. Co-parenting, in which parenting responsibilities are shared more or less equally by parents, appears to occur predominately in middle and middle-upper class families (Kimball, 1988; Ehrensaft, 1987). Androgynous parents typically are more highly educated (Tiedje et al., 1990),

and are professionals who have flexible work schedules (DeFrain, 1979; Kimball, 1988; Coltrane, 1990; Gerson, 1993; 1994). In these families, the parents' overall circumstances are comparable:

> Couples who reported that they shared child care were found more likely to have a male first-born, compatible work arrangements, and similar levels of income than were traditional couples. They were also more likely to feel that their relationship was egalitarian and that the division of labor in the household was satisfactory (Fish et al., 1992:83).

Studies of primary parent fathers nearly always find that respondents are middle or middle-upper class men, married to similar women (e.g., Radin 1994; 1986; Pruett, 1989; 1984).

Outside of co-parenting and the atypical arrangement in which fathers handle most child-rearing responsibilities and tasks, however, the findings regarding the relationship between class status and father involvement are mixed. Parent educational level, a factor in socioeconomic standing, was the most consistent predictor of father participation in several samples (see Tiedje and Darling-Fisher, 1993; Crouter and Crowley, 1990; Crouter et al., 1987). But the relationship of education to paternal involvement is complicated. For example, in one sample, mothers' higher education and fathers' decreased educational levels were related to fathers' increased participation (Tiedje et al., 1990); in another study (Snarey, 1993) mothers' education was positively correlated with father involvement. Fathers having higher IQ scores tend to be more highly involved in childrearing (Snarey, 1993), and men who enjoy their careers are more likely to have positive interactions with their children (Grossman et al., 1988). Volling and Belsky (1991:463) concluded that older, more educated men with more prestigious occupations and greater family incomes stimulated, responded to, and provided care more often to their nine month olds than did other men. They summarized the body of research:

> Several other studies have found that more involved fathers tend to have less prestigious occupations [Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili, 1988; Volling and Belsky, 1988]; spend less time absorbed in their work [Heath, 1978]; and work fewer hours [Coverman, 1985; Feldman et al., 1983; Grossman et al., 1988; Lamb et al., 1988; McHale and Huston, 1984; Nock and Kingston, 1988]. While job salience and work absorption seem to undermine paternal involvement, job satisfaction appears to exert the opposite effect; it is positively related to the father's use of reasoning as a form of discipline and inversely related to the severity of the punishment he dispenses [Kemper and Reichler, 1976; McKinley, 1964].

Rubin (1992; 1976) found that working class men, having little work autonomy or satisfaction and defining their primary familial roles as income-providing, leave most parenting work to their wives. Hochschild (1989) found that some blue collar men holding conventional gender role attitudes nonetheless participate extensively in parenting and housework, mostly out of the recognition that their wives have to step out of their traditional roles in order to help provide income. Perry-Jenkins and Folk (1994) found that working class wives may expect less parental and domestic participation from their spouses than do middle and upper-middle class wives.

**Time spent in paid employment.** The greater fathers' work hours, the lower their time investment in direct child caretaking (Grossman et al., 1988; Lamb et al., 1985). Another study found that the relationship between work and paternal involvement is more complex, however:

> Fathers' work is influential in determining the extent of fathers' involvement in play and affiliative behaviors, but not caregiving. As compared with fathers who had demanding jobs and probably less leisure, fathers who had less demanding jobs were not more involved in caregiving, but more involved in other modes of interactions. Apparently, leisure and availability are not sufficient conditions to promote caregiving behaviors among fathers, but lack of them considerably limits the extent of fathers' involvement in other areas (Levi-Schiff and Israelashvili, 1988:439).

Examining national survey data, Marsiglio (1991) found that unemployed men invested no more time in child care than did employed fathers (see also Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989). And summarizing research findings, Lamb and Oppenheim (1989:19) stated:

> Men do not trade off work time for family time in a one-to-one fashion. Survey data show that women translate each extra hour of nonwork time into an extra 40 to 45 minutes of family work (housework, childcare, food preparation, shopping, and the like), whereas for men each hour not spent in paid work translates into less than 20 minutes of family work [Pleck, 1983].

**Dual and single earner couples.** Among couples in which both parents have jobs, only a minority of men share parenting responsibility and care-giving fairly equally (Hochschild, 1989; Blair and Lichter, 1991; Weiss, 1990; Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989). "Even when both mother and father are employed 30 or more hours a week, the amount of responsibility assumed by fathers appears negligible" (Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989:12). As Lamb et al. (1987) noted earlier, even when fathers increase their availability or accessibility and direct interaction or engagement, they do not assume greater responsibility which remains, for most, essentially nonexistent. Men are responding less eagerly than women to the shift to dual-earners and resisting "movement toward more genuinely symmetrical marital roles" (Stanley et al., 1986:3). Many men prefer to be "mothers' helpers" rather than full parenting partners (Gerson, 1993). Spitze's (1988) review of literature found little, if any, variation in paternal child care activity among men in single-income and dual-income marriages; in both types, fathers did little.

Even married parents who are committed to shared parenting encounter some difficulties and tensions in achieving an egalitarian division of labor (Ehrensaft, 1987; Coltrane, 1990). "Couples find it easier to split housework than childcare [Ehrensaft, 1987]" (Pestello and Voydanoff, 1991:110). Moreover, couples typically move toward conventional gender roles upon the birth of a child; that is, role differentiation increases with the birth of a child, usually contrary to new parents' expectations (Cowan and Cowan, 1988; Fish et al., 1992). Fathers may have a more difficult transition to parenthood than mothers (Crnic and Booth, 1991; Cowan and Cowan, 1988; 1987; Nute, 1987; Osofsky and Culp, 1989; Grossman, 1987).

The research on the relationship between paternal involvement and mothers' employment is somewhat equivocal, however. For example, Barnett and Baruch (1987) and Snarey (1993) found that fathers are more involved in parenting when wives' work hours are greater. Some findings indicate that fathers only appear to be more involved when mothers are employed; they are *proportionately* more involved only because mothers' involvement declines, not because fathers' participation increases (Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989:12-13; Pleck, 1983; Lamb et al., 1987). Still other work suggests that fathers' involvement in child care actually may decline in relation to mothers' employment (e.g., Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984; Weiss, 1987).

What can be surmised from this array of findings is that men's employment is not a sufficient explanation for their limited parental involvement. The conclusion by Pleck and associates (1985/6:12) of nearly a decade ago still holds: "Research suggests that men's work role by itself is not a sufficient explanation....The effect of paid work hours on childcare time, a particularly important component of men's family roles, is quite weak." Snarey (1993:341) summarized the findings regarding married father involvement. "The combined findings suggest that making use of natural abilities, correcting for boyhood deficits, and responding to concurrent characteristics all play a role in predisposing some fathers toward higher levels of participation in childrearing."

## Effects on Children of Father Involvement in Married Families

After a long period of neglect, the effects of paternal involvement on children have been systematically studied during the past several decades (for reviews see Lamb and Oppenheim, 1989; Berman and Pedersen, 1987a; 1987b; Pacella, 1989). Radin et al. (1993:375-76) summarized some findings:

> Research conducted in the past 20 years has shown that fathers exert a strong influence on their young children. More specifically, greater quantity and better quality of father participation in childrearing have been found to foster higher levels of functioning in boys and to a lesser extent, in girls as well [Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984; Gottfried et al., 1988; Koestner et al., 1990; Nietfeldt, 1984; Pedersen et al., 1979; Radin, 1981; 1986; Radin and Russell, 1983].

In her comparative analysis of studies of fathers as primary caregivers, Radin (1994:46) reiterated her affirmative conclusions about the effects of paternal involvement: "In sum, there is no reason to believe that children's development is impaired as a result of being reared primarily by their fathers in two-parent homes, and there is some evidence that their growth is enhanced in desirable directions." And Pruett (1989:390), examining the findings from his study of 17 families in which fathers were the primary caregivers of infants, who all happened to be firstborn children, concluded: "Children raised primarily by men can be active, robust, and thriving infants. The majority of study infants functioned above the expected norms on standardized tests of development."

Children's cognitive development and social competence and adjustment are particular areas influenced positively by paternal involvement (Radin et al., 1993; Radin, 1981; Snarey, 1993; Pacella, 1989). Other areas influenced by direct father involvement in children's rearing and caregiving are empathy, gender attitudes, and internal locus of control. Lamb and Oppenheim (1989:21), investigating the

findings from studies in which fathers carried nearly half or more of the within-family childcare responsibility of preschoolers and infants, concluded: "Children with highly involved fathers are characterized by increased cognitive competence, increased empathy, less sex-stereotyped beliefs, and a more internal locus of control [Radin, 1982b; Radin and Sagi, 1982; Sagi, 1982; Pruett, 1984; Carlson, 1984; Easterbrooks and Goldberg, 1984]." Some research, but not all, suggests that fathers' involvement affects sons and daughters differently (e.g., Radin, 1982b; Snarey, 1993). Additionally, involved fathers influence their offspring indirectly by "providing instrumental and emotional support to their wives resulting in more sensitive maternal behavior and better child outcomes [Cowan and Cowan, 1987; Lamb, 1987; Oyserman et al., 1993]" (Radin et al., 1993:377). At the same time, "not only do fathers differ in the amount of time they spend in childcare, they also vary considerably in terms of their focus on renewing and developing their children's social, intellectual, or physical capacities during childhood or adolescence" (Snarey, 1993:316).

How higher levels of paternal involvement positively influence children is not understood. Lamb and Oppenheim (1989:21) observed that the explanation, in all likelihood, involves three overlapping factors: the assumption by parents themselves of less gender-stereotyped roles; the benefits to children from having two highly involved parents with the consequent diversity of stimulation; and the overall family context in which these children are raised. For instance, in such families, both parents are able to have close relationships with their children and pursue careers so that both parents may feel more fulfilled (see also Chodorow, 1978). And because of their typical middle or higher class status, these families may experience less stress than working class or low-income families. Lamb and Oppenheim (1989:22-23) offered a balanced caveat to the interpretation to-date of the recent research findings regarding the consequences of father involvement, mostly based on studies with well-educated, middle-class parents:

> The amount of time that fathers and children spend together is probably much less important than what they do with that time and how fathers, mothers, children, and other important people in their lives perceive and evaluate the father-child relationship....All of this means that high paternal involvement may have positive effects in some circumstances and negative effects in other circumstances; the same is true of low paternal involvement.

Reviewing the many transitions affecting families today, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991:15) also offered a cautionary reminder:

> As we've said, these shifting states [of families' organization and composition] make it extremely difficult to describe the family life of children today, much less to measure the effects of particular family arrangements on the developing child. But the important point is that a huge number of children are likely to experience complex family lives in response to their parents' complex family careers.

## *PATERNAL INVOLVEMENT POSTDIVORCE*

Divorced or separated fathers' parental involvement is highly varied, as is that of men who live with their children's mothers. On one end of the parenting continuum, fathers have sole custody and rear their children alone. At the other end, fathers are entirely disengaged from parenting, having no contact whatsoever with their offspring

while in between is a wide array of degrees of contact, ranging from very occasional contact to regular and frequent parental activity. With few exceptions, mothers are the primary parents after divorce, congruent with their roles prior to divorce (e.g., Serovich et al., 1992; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; USBC, 1994). More specifically, more than 85% of children whose parents are divorced are in the custody of their mothers. Maternal custody remains the national pattern, as it has been for most of the century (USBC, 1994; Riley, 1991). The proportion of children living with their fathers after divorce was 11.4% in 1986, up from 8.8% in 1980 (Furstenberg and Cherlin 1991:32); in 1993, of all households having minor children present, only 4% were headed by fathers only (USBC, 1994).

The divorce rate remains high, with over a million occurring annually in the United States. Roughly 60% of all newly formed marriages are expected to end in marital dissolution. More than half of all minor children have experienced their parents' divorce, or will before reaching the age of majority (Martin and Bumpass, 1989; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). The presence of children adds a major factor in divorce actions and outcomes: the need to establish and maintain workable living and parenting arrangements is "the most difficult and complex task of the divorce process" (Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987a:228; see also Bohannon, 1970).

## Child Custody in Divorce

Currently, children go into mothers' custody largely by default — that is, without much, and sometimes no, discussion between the parents (Arendell, 1995, 1986; Mnookin et al., 1990). Fathers in the Stanford Custody Project, involving a sample of more than 1000 families, indicated that they would have preferred an arrangement other than mother physical custody. But most never requested or sought an alternative (Mnookin et al., 1990).

> Why did so many fathers in our study not request the form of physical custody they said they wanted? It is possible that fathers who told us they wanted custody meant it less passionately than mothers who told us the same....Fathers might also have been responding to what they believed was the social expectation that women are 'supposed' to have custody and that fathers should not request it except in unusual circumstances. Another possibility is that the custodial desires of the mothers and fathers were almost equally strong but that many fathers realized their wishes were not realistic either because they were less experienced in the day-to-day management of the children's lives or because they expected to find it too difficult to coordinate the demands of their jobs with the demands of child care (Mnookin et al., 1990:72; see also Arendell, 1995).

Even though they do not pursue shared custody legally, fathers are more likely to indicate a desire to share custody than are mothers (Fishel and Samsa, 1993; Emery, 1988; Kitson and Morgan, 1990; Arendell, 1995).

### *Terms Used*

Terms used to describe postdivorce parenting arrangements and the meanings conveyed in the research literature vary. Further, the use of co-parenting in the divorce context carries various definitions. For instance, Furstenberg (1988) distinguished between *co-parenting* and *parallel parenting*:

> The term 'co-parenting', coined by social scientists to describe the

> collaborative efforts of parents who live apart, implies a certain level of cooperation in the common task of childrearing...the more common pattern among families in which fathers continue to see their children might be characterized as *parallel parenting* [in which parents] maintain separate and segregated relations with each of their children and have a tacit agreement not to interfere in each other's lives (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991:39-40).

In contrast, Ahrons and Wallisch (1987a:235) used the term *co-parenting*, or *co-parental*, to refer to the involvement of both parents with their children after divorce irrespective of the level of cooperation, which can range from minimal to high levels of parental interaction specifically about their children. Arendell (1995) used the term *parenting partnerships* to refer to those parents who collaborate and share parenting responsibilities after divorce. Maccoby et al. (1990) characterized such parenting as the "'cooperative' pattern."

*Shared* or *joint custody* is sometimes synonymous with the concept of co-parenting after divorce but not always. Many states now distinguish between joint legal and joint physical or residential custody. Far more common than shared residential custody, joint legal custody involves parents sharing legal parental rights and obligations; major decisions regarding children are to be made jointly by the parents. Maccoby et al. (1988:110-12) commented on the shift to joint legal custody:

> Our findings [from the Stanford Custody Project] reflect interesting compromises between opposing viewpoints in the joint custody debate. Parents appear to be embracing the norm that fathers should remain involved with their children after divorce. Still, they are not rejecting the idea that children, especially very young ones, should have their major residence with their mothers. The level of father physical custody is not increasing, but joint legal custody is. Most parents [in this California study] elect an arrangement that assigns physical custody to the mother and legal custody to both parents.

Nation-wide, mothers continue to be the primary residential parent even when joint legal custody is designated (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988:675; see also Weitzman, 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer, 1991a).

Shared or joint physical or residential custody is the situation in which "both parents have responsibility for the child for 'significant periods'," with the child typically spending four or more overnights in a two-week period with each parent (Mnookin et al., 1990:40). Thus, shared parenting does not necessarily involve a fully equal division of childrearing responsibility and caretaking (see Fineman, 1991; Ferreiro, 1990; Wolchik et al., 1985; Bowman and Ahrons, 1985; Ahrons, 1980; Mnookin et al., 1990; Hagen, 1987). Highly unusual in divorce is the consistent practice in which both parents jointly handle or equitably divide parenting tasks and responsibilities. Actual co-parenting subsequent to divorce involves a range of activities: sharing of major and day-to-day decisions and child-rearing and co-parenting problems; discussing children's personal problems; sharing children's school and medical problems; planning special events in children's lives; discussing children's adjustments to divorce, progress and accomplishments; and examining and planning child-related finances (Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b).

## Non-Custodial Fathers' Parental Involvement

Noncustodial fathers' involvement with children typically declines over time (e.g., Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Seltzer, 1991b; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). Indeed, father absence appears by all indications to be far more common than truly shared postdivorce parenting. Estimates of paternal absence, based on representative survey data, range from approximately 30% (Seltzer, 1991b), to nearly 50% of all divorced fathers (Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985). According to recent analyses of data from the National Survey of Families and Households, almost 60% of children whose parents are divorced see their fathers several times or less during the year, and only about 25% of children see theirs at least weekly. Just under a third of children who live with their mothers spend at least three weeks a year with their fathers; less than a third of children who see their fathers have extended periods of time with them (Seltzer, 1991b). Whatever data are accepted as most representative of divorced fathers' involvement, "the pattern of modest initial contact and a sharp drop-off over time is strikingly similar across studies" (Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991:36).

Thus, divorced fathers not living with their children usually have a limited range of parental involvement (e.g., Seltzer, 1991b; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Furstenberg and Nord, 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; Maccoby et al., 1988; Arendell, 1995). Many emphasize play and entertainment (Arendell, 1995), not unlike fathers' general activities in families before divorce (e.g., Lamb, 1987; Douthitt, 1988; LaRossa and LaRossa, 1989; LaRossa, 1988; Backett, 1987; Marsiglio, 1991). Fewer than one-third of divorced parents discuss their children with each other during a 12-month period, and just over 20% talk with each other about their children at least weekly. Even among those parents, the level of fathers' participation in decision making is limited: only 17% have a great deal of influence on decisions about important aspects of children's rearing, such as regarding health care matters, education, or religious teaching (Seltzer, 1991b; see also Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). According to survey data, "fewer than 1 [divorced] father out of 27 regularly assists his children with homework or attends school events. Over three-quarters of divorced fathers have never participated in the schooling of their children" (Teachman, 1991:367).

## Effects on Children of Limited Divorced Father Involvement

Some researchers conclude that children are adversely affected by their fathers' limited or non-involvement subsequent to divorce. The findings from studies by Hetherington and associates and Wallerstein and associates, especially, are widely cited. Both projects entail longitudinal research using several methods and small, middle class samples (e.g., Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Wallerstein, 1989; Kline et al., 1989; Hetherington et al., 1985; 1982; 1978). Other researchers argue that there is inadequate evidence to unequivocally support the assertion that children are adversely impacted by their parents' divorce. For instance, Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991:72) summarized the findings from the National Survey of Children:

> The amount of contact that children had with their fathers seemed to make little difference for their well-being. Teen-agers who saw their fathers regularly were just as likely as were those with infrequent contact to have problems in school or engage in delinquent acts and precocious sexual

behavior. Furthermore, the children's behavioral adjustment was also unrelated to the level of intimacy and identification with the nonresidential father. No differences were observed even among the children who had both regular contact and close relations with their father outside the home. Moreover, when the children in the NSC were reinterviewed in 1987 at ages 18 to 23, those who had retained stable, close ties to their fathers were neither more or less successful than those who had low or inconsistent levels of contact and intimacy with their fathers (see also Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Emery, 1988; Aquilino, 1993).

Emery (1988) observed that the most psychologically salient long-term influence on children is their relationship with the residential parent, not the physical separation of the parents, although it may be the most obvious and acutely distressing aspect of divorce (see also Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). While some research, mostly earlier work, suggests that boys are more adversely affected by father absence (e.g., Santrock and Warshak, 1979; Hetherington et al., 1978; 1982), other findings indicate that this is not the case or that the evidence is mixed (e.g., Chambers, 1984; Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; Emery, 1988; Kline et al., 1989; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991).

Various researchers conclude that it is intraparental conflict which most adversely affects children in divorce (e.g., Johnston et al., 1989; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Emery, 1988; Ferreiro, 1990). Many children enter the divorce phase already disadvantaged by exposure to parental strife and conflict (Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; Block et al., 1988; Block et al., 1986; Hetherington et al., 1982; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Without question, as a large body of literature demonstrates (e.g., Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Seltzer et al., 1989; Seltzer, 1991a), many children are adversely affected economically when fathers fail to contribute financial support subsequent to divorce: only about half of divorced fathers comply fully and regularly with child support orders. Moreover, child support payments amounted to only about 17% of the total income of custodial mothers and their children in 1989, with the average monthly child support payments made by fathers, not including those who contributed nothing, being 277 dollars (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). Mothers in several studies argued that the economic hardship which accompanied divorce was the source of most of their and their children's difficulties (Arendell, 1986; Kurz, 1995).

## Factors Affecting Divorced Fathers' Parenting Involvement

### *Family Discourse*

Subscribing to the predominant cultural definition of the family as the intact nuclear family (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990), many divorced men perceive only a restricted range of options for after-divorce associations with the former spouse. Although in one study most fathers insisted that they "would have liked" the "ideal" former spousal relationship — cooperative, mutually supportive, and friendly — in order to enhance or better protect the circumstances for their children and their own parental involvement, they neither knew how to attain it nor believed such a relationship was truly possible (Arendell, 1995; see also Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; Ambert, 1988). In their view, family was predicated on marriage and termination of marriage meant a breach in family, not just in the marital relationship. Thus, the men's understandings of themselves as fathers assumed a marital relationship to the mothers of their children: because spousal relations proved to be transitory, so too were parental relations

(Arendell, 1995). "It may be family boundary ambiguity in divorced families which contributes to low parental involvement and low levels of co-parental communication, especially among males" (Serovich et al., 1992:118).

### *Time Divorced*

Length of time divorced is associated with paternal absence: the longer the span divorced, the greater the proportion of father disengagement (Seltzer, 1991b; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987). This decline in paternal involvement over time is related to a decrease in association between divorced parents and continued antagonisms toward the former wife (Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; see also Hetherington et al., 1985; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Fox, 1985; Kruk, 1991; Arendell, 1995). Once in place, paternal disengagement is not usually reversed (Aquilino, 1994; Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Arendell, 1995).

### *Geographical Proximity*

Proximity facilitates nonresidential fathers' regular visitation and shared participation in routine activities (Furstenberg, Morgan, and Allison, 1987; Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; Hetherington et al., 1982; Fox, 1985; Hess and Camara, 1979). But close proximity is neither a necessary nor sufficient cause for paternal postdivorce involvement (Arendell, 1995; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991).

### *Child Characteristics*

Children's ages affect father involvement: the older the child(ren), the less likely paternal participation. In the Stanford Custody Project, "parents were more likely to be disengaged if their children were older than if they had at least one child under the age of six" (Maccoby et al., 1990:152). Child's age is related in many cases to length of time divorced also. Another factor in paternal involvement is the child's sex: nonresidential fathers maintain greater involvement with sons than with daughters (Marsiglio, 1991; Arendell, 1995).

### *Child Support Compliance*

A positive correlation exists between paternal involvement and compliance with child support. Further, some studies conclude that regular payment of child support is positively related to father satisfaction, and increased paternal satisfaction may further enhance fathers' desires to spend time with and to invest economically in their children (e.g., Seltzer et al., 1989; Krause, 1988; Dudley, 1991).

### *Former Wife's Influence*

Father-child relationships are facilitated by mothers after divorce (e.g., Serovich et al., 1992; Seltzer and Brandreth, 1994). Indeed, to a great extent, paternal involvement is dependent on the relationship with the former wife (Ahrons, 1983; 1981; Arendell, 1995; Serovich et al., 1992; Backett, 1982; 1987; Fox, 1985; Wallerstein, 1989; Maccoby et al., 1990; Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; Giles-Sims, 1987). Furstenberg and Cherlin (1991:74) commented on this phenomenon:

> Many men don't seem to know how to relate to their children except through their wives. Typically, when married, they were present but passive — not much involved in childrearing. When they separate, they carry this pattern of limited involvement with them; and it is reinforced by the modest contact most have with their children.

Further, many women choose to stop, or reduce significantly, their efforts to facilitate

the father-child relationship after divorce which further impedes many men's contact with their children (e.g., Arendell, 1986; 1995; Kurz, 1995).

**Conflict with the former wife.** Conflict with the former spouse is a major deterrent to nonresidential divorced fathers' parental involvement. Postdivorce former spousal tension and strife are not atypical, nor are lingering feelings of resentment and anger. For example, Wallerstein (1989) found that over half of the participants in her study, divorced ten years, were still quite angry at their former spouses. Mnookin et al. (1990:74) found high levels of on-going conflict: "For 30 percent of our sample there was significant conflict, and for 15 to 20 percent the conflict appeared to be serious." And in their study of former spousal relations at one and three years postdivorce, Ahrons and Wallisch (1987b:292-3) concluded,

> We have found that at least half of the sample do have relationships similar to ones depicted in the prevailing stereotypes....In general, what interaction they do have is negative and their feelings toward each other are usually hostile. Some may be indifferent, but many still harbor the anger arising from the marriage and divorce."

These researchers also found that 70% of former spouses in their study declared that they would not relate to one another if they were not parents together (see also Ambert, 1988; Kelly et al., 1988; Arendell, 1995; Maccoby et al., 1990; Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987a). Adding to the quagmire of former spousal conflict and its effects on joint parenting, some research has found that women and men perceive conflict differently (e.g., Fishel and Samsa, 1993; Girdner, 1988; Kitson and Morgan, 1990; Fishel and Scanzoni, 1989). The more well-educated the mother, the greater a father's participation, which may have to do with her commitment to maintaining father involvement despite negative feelings toward the former husband or to having better conflict resolution skills.

***Remarriage***

Cooperation between divorced parents is highest and divorced fathers tend to be more involved with their children when neither parent has remarried. For example, Ahrons and Wallisch (1987b:235-6) concluded that

> the number and frequency of childrearing activities shared between the former spouses (the 'coparental sharing scale') was highest when neither partner had remarried and lowest when only the husband had remarried. The amount of support in coparental interaction was highest and conflict lowest when neither partner had remarried, while conflict was highest and support lowest when only the husband had remarried. If neither former spouse had remarried, they were also most likely to spend time together with each other and their children; they were least likely to do so if only the husband had remarried.

Mothers' marital status and educational levels have more predictive value of fathers' role assessments after divorce than compliance with child support or direct parenting involvement (Seltzer and Bianchi, 1988).

## Co-Parenting After Divorce

The limited research on shared parenting after divorce indicates that it is most workable and likely to be maintained when the parents voluntarily establish the arrangement, not when it is dictated by the courts. Parents choosing shared custody must be innovative and creative since few models of successful co-parenting exist (Arendell, 1995; Ahrons

and Wallisch, 1987b; Ahrons, 1980; Kimball, 1988). How parents actually work out, structure, and manage co-parenting subsequent to divorce is largely unknown. Discussing the initial findings from the Stanford Custody Project, Maccoby et al. (1990:142) specified the gaps in knowledge about the details of managing custody arrangements, including shared custody:

> There is still relatively little information concerning the details of interparental cooperation — that is, the logistics of managing visitation and alternation, the division of responsibilities, the frequency and nature of communication, the amount of mutual undermining versus mutual backup — that prevails under different custodial arrangements.

The effects of class status and variations by race and ethnicity on co-parenting are among the areas needing investigation (Hagen, 1987; Clingempeel and Reppucci, 1982).

### *Factors Contributing to Maintained Co-Parenting After Divorce*

**Resources**. Shared parenting seems to require certain conditions, and is not suitable for all divorced parents (Donnelly and Finkelhor, 1992; 1993; Benjamin and Irvin, 1990; Emery, 1988). Successful and enduring co-parenting usually involves parents who have flexible employment so that schedules, both each other's and their children's, can be accommodated. In addition to the time resources, adequate incomes are needed because shared custody can be a costly enterprise. Two homes must be maintained and duplicate sets of some items obtained, especially bedroom furniture, clothing, toys, and other child-related supplies. Transportation needs are typically greater in the shared parenting arrangement. As would be expected given the additional expenses, divorced co-parents are typically middle- or upper-middle class and well-educated. So too they are usually older parents (Ahrons, 1980; Donnelly and Finkelhor, 1993; Kimball, 1988; Emery, 1988).

**Motivation**. Parents must be motivated to handle not only the logistics and planning required in co-parenting, which can be extensive and demanding, but to relate to each other in cooperative and collaborative fashions (Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; Hagen, 1987; Donnelly and Finkelhor, 1993; Fidler et al., 1989; Irving et al., 1984; Kimball, 1988; Abarbanel, 1979). Negotiations about child care issues are crucial in the co-parenting relationship, according to Fishel and Scanzoni (1989) (see also Maccoby et al., 1990). And those couples who are able to maintain friendly interactions as they divorce are more likely to achieve successful co-parenting situations (Dozier et al., 1993). The absence of spousal violence characterized all co-parent fathers compared to many others in one study (Arendell, 1995). Fidler et al. (1989) noted that custody and parenting arrangements need to be flexible since parents' circumstances can change and children's needs change as they grow.

**Planning**. Successful shared parenting for fathers in one study, in which as co-parent fathers they were a minority and a small number (only 9 of 75), entailed regular meetings with the former spouse to review and plan the "time sharing" schedule. Scheduling was seen to be the "key to success", and required a willingness to be flexible when circumstances demanded modification. Most of these parents either divided the week in two halves or alternated entire weeks. For younger children, especially, calendars were kept so that children could look and know where they would be, when. Older children were

included in the planning and discussions of needed adjustments, and were allowed to request adjustments, but were kept out of parental disputes. According to the fathers in the study, they and their former wives were diligent about maintaining direct contact with each other and not using their children as intermediaries. Bedrooms and play and storage spaces were maintained in both homes so that children felt that they lived in both places, as they in reality did. Some possessions, such as basic clothing and toys, were kept at each home while, in most of these families, some items, such as bicycles and skis, were shared between the households and transferred as needed. Children telephoned freely between the homes and their parents. A majority of these families had child care assistance from other relatives and, in several cases, these others, usually a grandmother and in one case a stepmother, were involved in the ongoing planning of schedules (Arendell, 1995).

**Communication and conflict avoidance**. Open and ongoing communication between the parents was the norm and viewed as essential to the workability of shared parenting. With the priority being children's well-being and adjustments, intraparental conflict was reduced and kept minimal, and was far lower among this group than among divorced parents having other custody arrangements. With only two exceptions, the fathers in this study indicated that their parenting involvement was greater in the co-parenting arrangement after divorce than it had been while they were married (Arendell, 1995). Several observed that the co-parenting arrangement required significantly more dialogue and communication with former spouse than had prevailed during the marriage and that the arrangement worked because of the former wife's high level of cooperation and commitment to the arrangement (see also Kimball, 1988).

Other studies have found that co-parenting situations do not entail less dissension between parents than the more standard custody arrangements (e.g., Maccoby et al., 1990; Bowman and Ahrons, 1985; Luepnitz, 1982; Emery, 1988; Mnookin et al., 1990). For example, Maccoby et al. (1990:152-53) in the Stanford Custody Project, found:

> Dual-residence parents talked to each other somewhat more frequently and in general maintained a higher level of cooperative communication. However, they did not experience less discord, and the prevalence of the conflicted pattern was as great in the dual-residence families as in the primary-residence ones. Within each residential group, there was great variability in how much cooperation or conflict the divorced couple maintained when both continued to be involved in parenting. These results would appear to indicate that sharing the residential custody of children after divorce does not systematically exacerbate conflict between the parents, nor does it systematically moderate such conflict.

And Emery (1988:93) concluded, "One study indicates that, in spite of considerable conflict, joint-custody can be successful if mutual parenting respect is maintained, personal feelings are distinguished from the needs of the children, and parental and spousal roles are separated [Steinman et al., 1985]."

A likely contributing factor to the discrepant finding regarding levels of conflict between co-parents is variation in states' procedures in establishing such custody arrangements. For example, in the Arendell (1995) study, fathers resided and divorced in New York State where joint residential custody is available *only* when both parents agree to such an arrangement. In contrast, in

some other states, shared custody is mandated sometimes as a solution to parental disagreement about custody (e.g., Maccoby et al., 1990; Mnookin et al., 1990; Emery, 1988).

**Parental Satisfaction**. Various researchers have found that parents who voluntarily enter into and maintain shared residential custody arrangements find them to be satisfying. Parents involved in enduring shared custody arrangements believe they are beneficial to their children (e.g., Ahrons and Wallisch, 1987b; Benjamin and Irving, 1990; Koch and Lowrey, 1984; Ambert, 1988; Kimball, 1988). At the same time, there is evidence that women and men have different experiences in and varied levels of satisfaction with these custody arrangements, with fathers being more satisfied typically than mothers (Ahrons, 1983; Benjamin and Irving, 1990; Emery, 1988).

### *Effects on Children of Shared Custody*

What the effects of joint custody are on children remains controversial (see, for example, Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991; Kline et al., 1989; Maccoby et al., 1988; Block et al., 1988; Block et al., 1986, Hetherington et al., 1985; Emery, 1988; Chase-Lansdale and Hetherington, 1990; Chambers, 1990; McKinnon and Wallerstein, 1988). Overall, there is still little research on the impacts of shared parenting on children after divorce, and none yet which examine the long-term effects of such arrangements (Benjamin and Irving, 1990). "Unintended consequences of joint custody options have been relatively unexplored" (Hagen, 1987:30). Reviewing the body of literature, Emery (1988:131) concluded that there is no definitive evidence that the co-parenting arrangement is either beneficial or harmful to children. He stated:

> In general, we are reminded that parenting, not legal custody status, is the real issue in terms of facilitating children's adjustment to divorce. While joint custody laws may eventually help to change attitudes about the need for cooperation in parenting, there seem to be limits to what can be achieved currently (see also Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991).

Glover and Steele (1989:198, 200), using a small sample of 24 families, compared the impacts on children of various parenting arrangements and concluded that the shared custody arrangement was beneficial.

> Joint-custody children had more 'most positive' responses than either intact-family or single-custody children in self-concept, father relationships, and mother relationships....[this] may have been [due to the fact] that the joint-custody parents [all of whom voluntarily agreed to the arrangement] maintained healthy attitudes toward parenting as revealed by the election of joint custody and, therefore, a willingness to work and maintain a positive relationship with the child. Or, is it possible that the parenting arrangement promoted the emotional health of both parents and child, resulting in the higher scores in self-concept and father relationships?

### *The Joint Custody Debate*

Some scholars endorse the push for shared residential custody (e.g., Warshak, 1986; Williams, 1988; Roman and Haddad, 1978), while others oppose it (e.g., Fineman, 1991; Goldstein et al., 1979). Still others urge caution until more is known (e.g., Donnelly and Finkelhor, 1993; Benjamin and Irving, 1990; Fidler et al., 1989; Hagen, 1987). Legal scholar Kay (1990:17) noted: "Despite its rapid acceptance by most American jurisdictions in one form

or another, joint custody remains controversial among family law scholars, child welfare experts, and feminists." Advocacy of shared custody has preceded rather than followed research findings demonstrating its benefits (Emery, 1988; Fineman, 1991).

Fineman (1991), among others, concluded that to uniformly mandate joint custody under the auspices of equal treatment of parents, as fathers rights groups demand (Bauer and Bauer, 1985; see Clatterbaugh, 1990; 1988; Coltrane and Hickman, 1992; Arendell, 1995), is to subordinate children's interests and needs by disregarding their primary emotional attachments, formed in the family prior to separation and divorce. Additionally, mandating shared custody irrespective of the pattern of past parental activity is to perpetuate gender-based marital inequities in that women's parenting work and the emotional bonds with children they have often reared largely alone, receiving little assistance from fathers, are ignored, if not devalued outright (e.g., Arendell, 1995). Fathers and mothers often view the justice of shared custody differently, with some fathers seeing it as a more equitable outcome and some mothers seeing it as unjust given their prior role as primary parent (e.g., Fishel and Samsa, 1993; Emery, 1988; Arendell, 1986; 1995).

Moreover, many scholars remain concerned that assigning parents shared residential custody against one or the other's wishes will only exacerbate former spousal conflict (e.g., Garkfinkel and McLanahan, 1990; Furstenberg and Cherlin, 1991). The opportunities for former spousal dissension and disagreement are great in joint custody situations since the parents are likely to have continued and extensive contact with each other, despite divorce. Furstenberg (1987:57-8), for instance, observed that parallel parenting may be functional in that it reduces conflict by segregating a parent's respective activities; reduces strain by limiting possibilities for observing the other parent in relation to the child; and reduces competition between parents and stepparents. Shared physical custody would counter these processes, increasing the possibilities for parental conflict. Further, parents may differ in their parenting approaches and styles, which may also contribute to dissension between them. Hetherington (1987:197) concluded that most divorced mothers use authoritative parenting style whereas divorced fathers' parenting styles vary across permissive, disengaged, authoritarian, and authoritative (see Baumrind, 1971). Some research, however, suggests that shared residential custody does not increase parental conflict (e.g., Maccoby et al., 1990; Bowman and Ahrons, 1985).

Just how significant parental conflict is in shared residential custody is part of the controversy about whether the operating presumption in custody decisions should be one of shared custody. For example:

> Probably the best conclusion that can be drawn from existing research is that joint custody appears to be preferable when both parents elect this option but that joint custody should not be *imposed* on unwilling parents in mediation or in a court hearing (Emery and Wyer, 1987b:478; see also Emery and Wyer, 1987a; Folberg and Milne, 1988).

In contrast:

> Our presumption is that joint custody should be considered first in the form of rebuttable presumption, and then ruled out only where appropriate in the child's best interest....Our experience is that the minimal cooperation necessary for parents to become able to do it can be achieved if we structure joint custody plans to

minimize negotiations and maximize clarity (Williams, 1988:4).

California, the first state to establish grounds which could be interpreted as favoring the presumption of shared custody in divorce in 1980, shifted back to somewhat more conventional custody guidelines in 1988 (Zimring, 1990 :viii; see also Kay, 1990; Fineman, 1991). The statutory language was clarified so that those working and negotiating with divorcing parents in the process of determining custody arrangements were encouraged to take into account parents' and children's needs, with the best interests of the child emphasized, and to not merely assign shared physical custody without careful consideration of the circumstantial particulars (Kay, 1990). This shift in focus came about as a result, at least in part, of the mounting evidence that shared custody arrangements are not suitable for all parents and children, and that many parents are uncooperative and resistant both with each other and in the implementation of custody mandates. Additionally, some parents are constrained by economic and other situational factors in managing shared residential custody.

## *YOUNG UNWED FATHERS*

Little attention has been directed to study of young unwed fathers, at least until quite recently (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Lerman and Ooms, 1993; Lerman, 1993a; Lerman, 1993b; Joshi and Battle, 1990; 1988/89; Barret and Robinson, 1982; Zayas et al., 1987). Policy analyses, scholarly studies, demonstration projects seeking to provide services to young fathers, and media campaigns aimed at preventing teenage pregnancy and legislative efforts aimed at establishing legal paternity emerged on the scene in greater numbers in the mid-1980s (Lerman and Ooms, 1993). Still, the knowledge base to date is tentative and exploratory (Wattenberg, 1993). Much of the literature pertaining to young fathers involves evaluations of programs aimed at high risk youths (e.g., Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Watson, 1992; Smith 1993/94; Sander and Rosen, 1987; Sander, 1993; Klinman et al., 1986; Sonenstein et al., 1993).

The terminology applied to young fathers is inconsistent across the literature. Lerman and Ooms (1993:19) provided the following definitions: "*Unwed fathers* are men who have never married. *Teenage* or *adolescent* refers to persons between age 13 and 19." *Young unwed fathers* in contrast, can include the population of fathers between ages 14 and 25 (as it does in the Lerman and Ooms [1993] volume).

### Demographics of Young Fatherhood

The United States has the highest rates of teenage pregnancy among the Western countries, even though the rates of pregnancy and childbearing are declining. In 1991, 369,000 unwed teenage girls became mothers (USBC, 1994). Less than one-half of all births to unwed mothers are to adolescent women even though the rates of *unmarried* teenage women bearing children continues to rise. Between 1960 and 1986, births to unmarried women ages 15 to 19 increased from 15 to 33 per 1000 unmarried women, with a 25 percent increase between 1986 and 1991, according to the National Center for Health Statistics (Vobejda, 1994). Of the minority of pregnant teen parents who marry, most divorce, usually within only several years (Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan, 1987; Riley, 1991).

The number of adolescent fathers is lower than the number of adolescent mothers since men are often older than the women they impregnate. Census data for 1991 indicate that mothers under age 20 of newborns outnumbered fathers under age 20 of newborns by four times (USBC, 1994).

Adolescent parenthood usually has important adverse economic, social, and academic consequences (Rivara et al., 1987:204; Gershenson, 1983). Unwed fathers of children born to teen mothers are the least likely to provide child support, and the households of these children and their mothers are the most likely to be poor, and persistently poor (Bumpass and McLanahan, 1989; Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). Much of the rise in children's poverty is related to the decline of married couple families (Lerman and Ooms, 1993; Wattenberg, 1993; Harris, 1993). More specifically,

> children born out of wedlock now constitute the majority of children receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC); and it is estimated that more than 40 percent of never-married women who enter the AFDC system by age 25 with a child less than three years old will spend 10 years or more on welfare (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:A1).

At the same time, however, many women who become young mothers are already disadvantaged. Black women are more likely to have a premarital birth than White women because they are more likely to come from high-risk backgrounds. Black women coming from high-risk backgrounds are three times more likely to have births out-of-wedlock than Black women from low-risk backgrounds (Bumpass and McLanahan, 1989:279; see also Luker, 1991). Young motherhood carries disproportionate health risks for both mothers and their infants (Luker, 1991; Edelman, 1987; Hans et al., 1991; Zuckerman and Brazelton, 1994; Gershenson, 1983; Harris, 1993).

**Racial and ethnic variations**. Racial and ethnic variations in adolescent parenthood are pronounced, with the proportion of unwed fathers among Blacks being higher than among Whites or Hispanics. Twenty percent of Black men become unwed fathers early. "The racial differences are too large to ignore. Unwed fatherhood is most widespread among young Black men, even in comparison to other young men from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Lerman, 1993a:48). Contributing to the phenomenon, Black fathers have lower marriage rates so the proportion of unwed fathers remains higher among this group than others (Mincy, 1994a; 1994b; Danziger and Radin, 1990; Comer, 1989). Young Black men are less likely to use contraceptives than are Whites. So too, Black adolescent males tend to reject abortion as an option to an unplanned pregnancy (Joshi and Battle, 1988/89). The overall risk factors contributing to teen pregnancy as well as serving as disincentives for marriage are greater for Blacks than other groups (Bumpass and McLanahan, 1989; Lerman, 1993a; 1993b; Wilson, 1987; Wilson and Neckerman, 1985; Luker, 1991; Mincy, 1994a; 1994b; Comer, 1989).

Hispanic adolescent f thers are rapidly increasing in number (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). Young Hispanic men share many of the risk factors characterizing young Black men (Zayas et al., 1987). Because discussion of adolescent fathers (and single fathers more generally) is particularly deficient with respect to Latinos (see Mirandé, 1988) overviews often imply, by their neglect of this population, that these fathers "feel the same stresses and problems as non-Hispanic adolescent fathers" (Zayas et al., 1987:240). What is not known is whether young Hispanic parents vary from others in retaining closer ties to their families of origin and extended kin due to the vitality of the ideology of *familism* (Zayas et al., 1987; Zayas and Palleya, 1987). How the father role is performed within *la familia* and as well as what place patriarchal conventions and the ideology of machismo holds in young

Hispanic fathers' actions are not yet understood (see Mirandé, 1988; Baca Zinn, 1994; 1982; 1975; Nieto, 1983; Torres and Singh, 1986).

Racial and ethnic variations characterize the marital patterns of teen mothers irrespective of the ages of the fathers. Presently, "about one-half of all babies delivered to White teen mothers are born outside of marriage; for Black teens the proportion is 91 percent [Moore, Snyder, and Halla, 1991]" (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:2; see also Robinson, 1988). These patterns persist beyond adolescence: mother-only families are a higher proportion of Black families with children (58%) than White families with children (20%), even though such families are increasing faster among Whites than Blacks (Bumpass and McLanahan, 1989; National Center for Health Statistics, 1993; 1990; USBC, 1994).

## Social Risk Factors for Young Fatherhood and of Young Fathers

Much of the research, limited though it is, of young unwed fathers involves men of color, particularly African-American youth. This focus has to do not only with the higher proportion of Black men becoming early fathers but also with the location of programs aimed at providing services to young fathers. The usual sites for such projects are economically depressed urban areas where minority youth at risk disproportionately reside.

Most adolescent fathers occupy a high risk status. For example, "data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Force Behavior of Youth found that African American young men coming from economically deprived circumstances and having educational deficiencies are disproportionately represented among those who become fathers at an early age" (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:A-4). Generally poorly educated, young fathers typically have few, if any, job skills and they lack work experience. Joblessness, especially among minority youth, is a primary factor in their not marrying the mothers of their children, according to various researchers and theorists (e.g., Wilson, 1987; Wilson and Neckerman, 1985; Mincy, 1994a; Danziger and Radin, 1990; Sonenstein et al., 1993). These young men's employment prospects for the future are weak: the "road to economic self-sufficiency is arduous" (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:99). Numerous barriers interfere with young fathers' employment possibilities, including, according to a study of urban teen fathers, "criminal records, inadequate transportation, problems with drugs or depression, and discrimination based on race, age or sex" (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:22; Lerman, 1993a; 1993b; see also Watson, 1992; Sander and Rosen, 1987; Smith, 1993/94; Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, 1988; and, for risks for African American youth, specifically, see Lee, 1994; Mincy, 1994a; 1994b).

Teen fathers often suffer from low self-esteem and feelings of isolation and alienation from their peers, resulting from their poor socioeconomic backgrounds, lack of educational and employment success, and family of origin experiences (e.g., Sander and Rosen, 1987; Mincy, 1994a; Zayas et al., 1987; Joshi and Battle, 1990; 1988/89). Urban, poor Black adolescent fathers in one study were comparable to peers who were not fathers with respect to age of initial sexual activity and its frequency, and in their use, and nonuse, of contraceptives. "However, the teenage fathers were less likely to perceive pregnancy as disruptive of their lives, and came from family environments in which teenage childbearing was more common" (Rivara et al., 1987:203). A study of 150 teen minority fathers found that 50% lived in a single-parent household, were not active members of a church, reported engaging in sexual activity before age 15, and

had had multiple sex partners with only one-third using contraceptives (Joshi and Battle, 1988/89; see also Lerman and Ooms, 1993). Another study, with 50 adolescent father participants, concluded that young parenthood was related to dropping out of school, external locus of control, employment (presumably because teen men with employment tended to have greater numbers of sexual partners [Ku et al., 1993]), and a dislike of contraceptive use [Hendricks and Montgomery, 1984]).

Young fathers lack male parental role models both in their immediate families and neighborhoods (e.g., Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Mincy, 1994a; Smith, 1993/94; Wilson, 1987; Hardy et al., 1989). Additionally, they have few parenting skills and are more prone to punitive, harsh, and abusive disciplinary behaviors than are other fathers. Bolton (1987:79), considering children identified as being at high risk for child abuse at the hands of their adolescent parents, observed: "Alcohol abuse, substance dependencies, involvement with the criminal justice system, and difficulty in controlling one's temper are presented as issues for a number of young fathers."

## Unwed Father Parenting Involvement

Adolescent unwed fathers typically have very limited parental involvement with their offspring. No research was found that focused specifically on co- or shared parenting among teen parents. Rather, what is looked at with respect to adolescent parenting by men is parenting involvement of any kind, and parental non-participation.

Even though there is widespread agreement that young unwed fathers' parental participation is low, various researchers argue that empirical evidence refutes the common, negative stereotypes about these men. These myths purport that young unwed fathers have only casual relationships with the mothers of their children, are absent because they do not want to contribute financially, feel no attachment to their offspring, and deny paternity (Watson, 1992; Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Wattenberg, 1993; Harris, 1993; Klinman et al., 1986). Discussing the findings of the Teen Father Collaboration Project, Bolton (1987:110), for example, said that these findings "may have helped at least partially to erase the stereotype that all teenage fathers neglect their parental responsibilities" (see also Danziger and Radin, 1990).

### *Presence at Birth and Paternity Declaration*

Participants in the Young Unwed Fathers Project (YUFP) reported being involved with their offspring. Implemented in six sites across the country, the program involved 495 young fathers. Seventy-five percent of these fathers indicated that they visited their child in the hospital at the time of birth. Eighty-five percent said they were listed on the child's birth certificate as the father, and nearly a quarter reported living in the same household as their child's mother and child at least for a time (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994). In the Wattenberg (1993) study, 62% of Black and 52% of White young unwed respondents had signed a declaration of paternity, and nearly two-thirds stated they had been present at their child's birth. In contrast, one-third of teen mothers in another study reported less father involvement, indicating that the fathers abandoned them once the pregnancy was confirmed, often denying paternity and engaging in new relationships (Jacobs 1994:457).

### *Contact and Caregiving*

In the YUFP study, 39% of those not living with their children reported that they had seen their children 'almost every day' over the course of the past month; 70% said

they had seen their children at least once a week.

> Even more revealing of the role that many of these fathers play in the lives of their children are their activities when they are together. More than 50% said they took their child to the doctor; and large percentages report bathing (46%), feeding (81%), dressing (73%) and playing with (87%) their child (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:A-5).

Among adolescent fathers in another study, only 13% were reported as being "somewhat" involved in caregiving with mothers doing 87% of the child care while 30% had no contact whatsoever with their child (Bolton, 1987). Other researchers have found that young fathers can and sometimes do provide recreational activities to their offspring (e.g., Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Wattenberg, 1993; Sullivan, 1993; 1989).

Teen fathers' involvement, limited from pregnancy and childbirth onward, declines over time (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Furstenberg and Harris, 1993; Lerman, 1993b; Wattenberg, 1993; Hardy et al., 1989), as does that of many married and divorced older fathers. Danziger and Radin (1990) found in a telephone survey of 289 adolescent mothers receiving public assistance that the younger the offspring, the higher the level of father participation. Further,

> Younger rather than older males were reported to be more involved with their children. Perhaps this discrepancy is attributable to the fact that the baby in this study is more likely to be the firstborn for the young men, whereas the older absent fathers were more likely to have other children (1990:640).

Examining a sample of young men ages 14 to 21, drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Labor Market Survey, Lerman (1993b:45) specified the decline in young fathers' contact with their children:

> In 1986 the proportion who visited more than once a week was 57 percent among fathers with a child 2 years or younger, 40 percent for ages 2 to 4.5 years, 27 percent for ages 4.5 to 7.5, and 22 percent for 7.5 years and older. Almost one in three unwed fathers whose oldest child was 7.5 or older reported never visiting those children.

### *Financial Support*

Some adolescent fathers contribute financially to the maintenance of their child. The payments are usually low and sporadic since these men's economic circumstances are generally dismal and uncertain (e.g., Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Robinson, 1988; Smith, 1993/94; Wattenberg, 1993; Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, 1988). Young fathers are the least likely to have been assigned child support orders. Among a sample of the participants in the Young Unwed Fathers Project, only 30% of the fathers indicated that they had child support orders, averaging $118 per month. More than 70% reported being in arrears. Numerous fathers in this study reported that they contributed money directly to the mothers of their children in addition to paying for other items, including food, clothing, diapers, and medicine (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Watson, 1992; see also Robinson, 1988). And in a study of 145 fathers whose children had adolescent mothers, nearly two-thirds contributed some economic support to the mother and child. The proportion of adolescent fathers who contributed consistently was comparable to that of older fathers, although the older fathers were more

likely to contribute full support (Bolton, 1987).

Economic contributions from young fathers decline over time. Furstenberg and Harris (1993) found that a year after birth to a teenage mother, 80% of the children in a Baltimore study were receiving some financial support from their fathers. Four years later, however, just one in three received any contributions from the nonresidential father, and by the time the children reached mid-adolescence, only one in six was receiving any support from nonresidential fathers (1993:122). Over the long-term those men who had married their children's mothers, even if the marriage was of short duration, were more likely to continue providing some financial support (1993:123).

## Factors Affecting Young Fathers' Limited Parental Involvement

Adolescent fathers' caregiving for their children is constrained by numerous factors. Teenagers are engaged in age-related developmental issues, including the need to achieve separation and autonomy, even as they begin to form deeper attachments with persons outside of the family of origin (Jacobs, 1994; Robinson, 1988; Lee, 1994). Early fatherhood poses unique developmental challenges (e.g., Applegate, 1988; Lee, 1994; Harris, 1993), and these are further compounded by young fathers' social circumstances. Teen fathers are simultaneously children and parents; the parental role is understood in this society to be appropriate for adults and few supports are available for those who enter this status before reaching some level of adult maturity. Further,

> adolescent fathers have multiple anxieties, stressors and concerns. The stressors for an adolescent father include worries about providing financial support to his new family; maintaining or getting a job; possibly not being able to finish school; events occurring during labor and delivery; and what the welfare and health of the child will be [Elster and Panzarine, 1983a; 1983b]. Teen fathers have an underlying fear of marriage and of responsibilities of fatherhood (Joshi and Battle, 1990:26).

Research suggests that younger first-time fathers are less involved in parenting than first-time fathers in their late twenties and early thirties (Hawkins et al., 1993; Cooney et al., 1993; Coltrane, 1990).

The parental participation by adolescent fathers and its decline is most related to the relationship with their child's mother (e.g., Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Lerman and Ooms, 1993). These relationships are often limited and strained, though several studies indicate that a sizable proportion of teen fathers have some continuing associations with their pregnant girlfriends, lasting, sometimes, into the early years of their child's life (Wattenberg, 1993). Most young fathers do not live within the same household as their children. Young fathers, like older ones (e.g., Arendell, 1995), find it difficult to separate out their feelings toward their children's mothers from those about their children; anger about money and child support orders and frustration over feeling displaced from the affections of their offspring's mothers interfere with their relationships with their children (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:87-88). Moreover, the relationship between young parents is poorly defined and often ambiguous (e.g., Furstenberg and Harris, 1993).

Danziger and Radin (1990:640) found that a lack of adequate employment participation limited both young fathers' involvement with parenting and mothers' willingness to allow them access: "These findings support the work of Wilson and colleagues that emphasize the critical factor of

joblessness in accounting for the diminished family role of the father in disadvantaged, underclass communities [Wilson 1987, Wilson and Neckerman, 1985]." Cited also as reasons for diminished involvement by young fathers in one study were time constraints and distance (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:46). More likely explanations, however, were competing interests, such as peer group involvement, reluctance to maintain a continuing relationship with the mother of their child, and involvements with other women, since most of these young men neither attended school regularly or held steady employment. In sum, the same factors which put young men at risk for becoming early fathers are likely contributors, in turn, to their limited parental involvement. These include, among others, joblessness, substance abuse, low self-esteem, lack of paternal models, strained interpersonal relationships, poor education and literacy skills, and difficulties distinguishing feelings about their children from those about their offsprings' young mothers.

## Effects of Paternal Involvement on Children

Many argue that children will benefit inevitably from the involvement of two parents rather than only one. Yet too little is known about the impact of young fathers' parental involvement, let alone sustained involvement, to make a convincing case that children's development and well-being are clearly enhanced by father participation. While some attention has focused on young fathers' involvement with or absence from their infants' lives, little consideration has been given to fathers' participation across children's development, into the stages of childhood and adolescence (Parke and Neville, 1987; Furstenberg and Harris, 1993; Lerman and Ooms, 1993). One significant exception is the work of Furstenberg, Brooks-Gunn, and Morgan (1987). Initiated in the mid-1960s, the study of teenage parents involved several follow-ups, including interviews with the children of the teen mothers. When contacted in 1987, these offspring themselves were between the ages of 18 and 21. With respect to the forming of attachments to their biological fathers or other men serving as father figures,

> only a small minority of the children of teen mothers form close bonds to their biological father (who may or may not live in the home); a somewhat greater number (but still a small fraction of the total sample) develop strong ties with another father figure, either a stepfather in the home or a relative or former stepfather outside the home (Furstenberg and Harris, 1993:126).

More specifically, 9% of the children lived their entire childhood with the father in the home while 8% had no father figure whatsoever. Overall, on average, the children in the sample spent about one-third of their childhood living with their biological father in the home. (Most of today's children born to unwed parents are not likely to spend this length of period living together with their biological fathers since the marriage rate among adolescents has declined so significantly.) Drawing from an array of measures utilized in the 20–year follow-up, and noting that the relationship between paternal involvement and child well-being is complex, thus contributing to varied assertions about the significance of paternal involvement, Furstenberg and Harris (1993:129) concluded that "the presence of fathers at most appears to have only a weak effect on key outcomes in early adulthood." It must be noted, however, that some, including, for example, Danziger and Radin (1990) and Joshi and Battle (1990), argue that the involvement of young fathers is important to the well-being of young mothers

and the development of their offspring as well as to the men themselves.

## Public Policy Efforts

Federal and state governments have taken an increasingly active role in attempting to hold unwed fathers to their parental responsibilities, primarily that of income providing. As a result of the Family Support Act of 1988, especially, efforts to establish paternity have been heightened (Wattenberg, 1993; Howe, 1993; Harris, 1993; Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1990), including among adolescent parents. The motivation behind this policy implementation is primarily economic: legislatures and government agencies are intent on better enforcing the financial responsibilities of nonresidential parents. A factor in young unwed fathers' non-provision or limited economic support, according to numerous policymakers, is the failure to establish paternity. Numerous other benefits are possible from formal establishment of paternity, including a child's right to know the identity of his or her parents and to have access to benefits which may become available in the future, according to proponents of paternity declaration (see, for example, Lerman and Ooms, 1993; Wattenberg, 1993).

Currently the disincentives for declaring paternity are great, especially the present policy in which child support orders are levied as soon as paternity is established. Because children receive only 50 dollars of a father's support when a mother receives public assistance, with the balance going to the state to help defray the costs of AFDC, fathers resist paying the support as ordered, and others avoid the system altogether.

> In the fathers' eyes, their earnings are feeding the system, not their children. If they evade the system, the child has access to the full amount the father is able to contribute. For themselves and their children, who both live in the margin of poverty, this is a rational economic decision (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:100; see also Wattenberg, 1993; Danziger et al., 1993; Lerman and Ooms, 1993).

The pattern of avoiding the formal system and making direct contributions makes it difficult to know what unwed adolescent fathers' economic contributions to their children actually are.

Despite the assorted new regulations aimed at obtaining paternity declarations, often against even the mothers' wishes (Wattenberg, 1993), it is questionable how significant young fathers' economic contributions to their offspring can be. At the same time, while their monetary contributions may be relatively insignificant in terms of maintaining the child, they may be important indicators of father involvement and intentions (see Danziger and Radin, 1990). Wattenberg (1993:230) summarized the present state of affairs:

> It is tempting to conclude that current national and state paternity policy for young parents is in a state of confusion, partly due to the lack of definition of "responsibility", and little consensus on what kind of family formation provides stability and continuity for the child.

Moreover, forms of support other than financial need to be considered by researchers and policymakers. Smith (1993/94:4), for instance, noted:

> The economic status of many young fathers presents an equally compelling case for a more immediate "alternative currency" approach that would recognize and value what fathers can give — time, emotional support, respite care and a host of in-kind and intangibles.

## Unwed Young Fathers' Parental Rights

At the same time as policy efforts focus increasingly on holding parents responsible financially, further attention will likely be given to unwed fathers' parental rights, according to some (e.g., Harris, 1993). Howe (1993:164) posed this argument:

> Young unwed fathers as a rule do not yet enjoy all the constitutional protections accorded married or divorced parents....the legal rights and obligations of all unwed fathers have evolved unevenly. Because of the public policy shift to hold parents financially responsible for their offspring, as reflected in federal and state legislation, and because of the new technology (DNA fingerprinting) that enables definitive establishment of paternity, *most* unwed fathers can expect to have the full financial obligations of parenthood imposed upon them. In contrast, their legal rights as parents may be heavily circumscribed or completely thwarted by the actions of the mother of their child. For the most part, the obligations imposed outstrip the legal rights accorded.

Just what these young men have to offer in the way of parenting is left largely unaddressed, however, in the discussions about "paternal rights" and, at least to date, despite legal and technological changes, these fathers are not having imposed upon them the "full financial obligations of parenthood." And the focus on legal rights must not obscure the reality that many young unwed fathers, being themselves disadvantaged and at risk, may not be capable of providing healthy, nurturing, and safe parenting (see Bolton, 1987).

## Programs Aimed at Young Fathers and Research Needs

Programs aimed at adolescent unwed fathers have been relatively few. Services for adolescent parents are still much more likely to be geared to mothers than to fathers (e.g., Kiselica and Sturmer, 1993; Sander and Rosen, 1987; Leitch et al., 1993). Emphasized in programs directed at young unwed fathers are development of human capital, such as job skills and education. Less attended to are psychological growth and interpersonal relationships, such as parenting skills and strategies for parental involvement. Evaluations of programs geared for young fathers indicate that gains are modest. One explanation is that the social, economic, and educational needs of these young fathers are extensive, and programs operate under the burden of inadequate resources. As Furstenberg and Brooks-Gunn (1986:326) concluded:

> In sum, our reading of the data is that for teenage parents, programs are probably worthwhile, but they are likely to have only a modest impact in ameliorating the consequences of early parenthood. But this is truly an area where an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Among various demonstration projects, the findings from three receive extensive attention in the literature: Public/Private Ventures' Young Unwed Fathers Pilot Project (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994; Watson, 1992), the Teen Father Collaboration, under the auspices of the Bank Street College of Education (Sander and Rosen, 1987; Sander, 1993), and the Philadelphia Children's Network Father Re-Engagement Initiative (Smith, 1993/94). Each has offered multifaceted programs aimed at improving the circumstances confronting teen fathers and encouraging

them to be fuller parental participants in the lives of their offspring. The components of these programs entail job training, education, counseling, parent education, child development, and couples counseling.

Recruiting young fathers into programs and maintaining their involvement was found to be a challenge in each study. Additionally, each project evaluation lamented the cultural and social policy disincentives which undermine or negate young fathers' parental involvement. Better and fuller coordination of agencies and services and greatly expanded employment and training programs are urgent needs, according to program evaluators and researchers. More specifically, Achatz and MacAllum (1994:102), drawing from the findings with the Young Unwed Fathers Project, asserted:

> Clearly, there is a need to rethink public efforts on behalf of dependent and impoverished young families. These efforts — which include public assistance, child support enforcement, and employment and training policies and programs — require coordination at the national level, and cooperation between the various agencies and actors at the local level. If they are to be effective, they must also be more realistic and integrated. The real-life conditions that bring a young person within the scope of these policies are not distinct and unrelated (Achatz and MacAllum, 1994:102).

At this point, societal efforts are mostly directed at enforcing child support compliance, often at unrealistic levels, and neglecting the other potential contributions some young fathers might be able to provide (e.g., Sanders, 1993).

Other program assessments addressed another need: sex education is necessary in order to decrease repeat parenthood among adolescent parents, which currently is a high probability (Rivara et al., 1987). And Rozie-Battle (1988/89) made a specific argument that legal institutions, families, churches, schools, and community and social service agencies need to provide young African-American men information regarding paternity in order to assist them to make informed decisions about sexual activity and potential fatherhood (see also Joshi and Battle, 1990). Adolescent father involvement can be encouraged by assisting teen fathers to end their substance dependencies and learn appropriate and less damaging ways to express their anger. Additionally, fathers' involvement can be enhanced by helping teen mothers to encourage and allow fathers' involvement in their children's lives (Oz and Fine, 1991; Wattenberg, 1993; Danziger and Radin, 1990).

> Programs geared toward young unwed fathers may enhance their processes of maturation. Involving unwed young fathers in order to make whatever resources they may have available to their children and to lighten the burden on young mothers, according to Smith (1993/4:4), offers the potential of a transformative influence on them. Connecting these young fathers with their children has imbued these young men with a sense of the future, and by doing so, has provided them a compelling reason to change their behaviors and their lives. This transformative potential of parenting could be a powerful strategy for connecting to a generation of young men who seem to be orbiting farther and farther away from the mainstream (see also Pirog-Good, 1993; Leitch et al., 1993; Sander, 1993; Joshi and Battle, 1990; 1988/89; Danziger and Radin, 1990).

Just how competent disadvantaged youth can be or become at parenting remains unknown. In the longer term, what is most needed is the alleviation of child and adolescent poverty and inner-city despair.

Youth need to be offered realistically attainable and positive alternatives and choices for their futures (e.g., Ellwood, 1988). Prevention of teen pregnancy is the most constructive and promising strategy with respect to young parenthood. Simultaneously, however, the needs and potentialities of young fathers demand attention. Sander (1993:297), examining and evaluating the Teen Father Collaboration project — "the largest study on programs for adolescent fathers to date" — concluded:

> In sum, federal and state governments need to allocate more funds in an effort to reduce adolescent pregnancy and to assist those adolescents who have become parents too early. More research is needed to ascertain what kinds of programs best meet the needs of the teen mothers, teen fathers, and those young people at risk for adolescent pregnancy and parenthood (1993:313).

## *CONCLUSION*

A review of the literature on co-parenting reveals that shared parenting is atypical, even among married parents who live together with their children. The explanation for men's limited parental participation is multifaceted. One primary, and common, explanation is that the American workplace has made few widespread accommodations to enable parents to more effectively handle simultaneously the demands of family life and childrearing with full-time employment. Nor have the employment or governmental policy sectors done much to openly assert that men, not only women, have caretaking responsibilities. Even as women have moved to sharing the family provider role, the traditional gender role ideology persists. Kay (1990:35) summarized the situation: "Contemporary social, cultural, and economic factors all tend to inhibit fathers from any realistic commitment to qualifying as the [or *a*] primary caretaker of children" (see also, for example, Risman, 1989; Risman and Schwartz, 1989).

Some argue that men's choices to restrict their own childrearing and care activities are primarily responsible for their limited parental participation. Levy-Schiff and Israelashvili (1988:439), for example, concluded that contextual conditions and personal variables are almost equally influential in caregiving and affiliative behaviors among men. Based on her study of fathers, Gerson (1993:87) concluded, "Given that equal fathers perform a juggling act with as few social supports as employed mothers possess, it is hardly surprising that so few men choose equality." And Pleck and associates (1985/86:12) noted: "The central issue is whether men themselves, rather than social-structural and socialization factors, are responsible for men's low family participation" (see also Fineman, 1991; Cohen, 1989; Ferree, 1990). Many men will remain reluctant to assume the responsibilities of primary or shared caregiving until caring activities become genuinely valued and socially recognized (e.g., Gerson, 1993). Yet, paradoxically, until men participate more fully in childrearing, the system of gender stratification will persist.

Another consequence of the persistence of the gendered division of parenting labor and the gender belief system, more generally, which posits that women have unique abilities for nurturing activities, is the pivotal role that mothers play in fathers' parenting participation. Many men depend on their wives for facilitation of their relationships with their offspring. This dependency creates barriers to father involvement even in married families, but is particularly problematic for fathers who do not live with the mother of their offspring. Until fathers learn how to initiate, maintain, and promote at least somewhat independent relationships with their children, co-parenting will remain out of

reach for most parents. The continued high divorce rate and rise in out-of-wedlock births adds to the significance of this dimension of men's parental involvement.

Father involvement is important to children. It is also significant in related, sundry ways for children's mothers and society, at large. Moreover, parenting involvement is important to men themselves. Childrearing can promote adult psychological development. For example, Snarey (1993:353), who examined the data on four generations of paternal participation using the Eriksonian development model in which generativity is recognized as a major mid-life developmental task, concluded: "The most important finding of this study is that fathers who participate strongly in childrearing are also more likely to become societally generative at midlife." Vaillant (1993 :xii) commented on these findings:

> Snarey provides evidence that the responsive participation of fathers in their children's lives, both when they were young and when they were adolescents, not only had a significant impact on these children's lives, but also was of significant influence on the fathers. In other words, generativity is a two-way street (see also Radin et al., 1993).

Greater parental involvement will likely contribute to men's personal development, increased self-esteem, and maturing processes and, in turn, further enhance men's parenting participation, enhancing and strengthening father-child relationships. Thus, men's increased and enhanced parental participation may well, in turn, contribute to the betterment of social life overall.

To encourage parents interested in fuller co-parenting and to better accommodate those already sharing childrearing tasks and responsibilities, numerous changes are needed. While the three primary structural family arrangements — intact married, separated or divorced, and young unwed — have somewhat unique situations and needs, all will benefit from certain reforms. These include our collectively: eroding or ending the conventional gender role socialization, and encouraging both boys and girls to develop nurturing and caregiving skills and interests; insuring high quality education and job training, even in low-income areas; reforming the workplace and providing more flexible work schedules, paid parental leave policies, better-paying part-time jobs with health care and retirement benefits, and instituting comparable pay provisions; developing affordable and high quality child care programs; offering job training and remedial education programs; making available and encouraging participation in parenting education programs; establishing mediation for parents choosing to divorce and needing to establish child custody arrangements; reducing the adversarial approach in divorce; reforming the welfare program with the primary goal being that of empowering families; providing income supports to working poor families; and establishing community centers which offer families information on services and resources available to families and children. Such policy changes and innovations are befitting of a wealthy society and can only enhance and empower parents, in every family arrangement. Children need loving and competent parents who can meet their needs and promote their emotional, cognitive, and physical growth and development. They can only stand to benefit when both parents are capable and committed to rearing them.

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